DreamTime

POETRY COLLECTION

From My Bookshelf To Yours, Beloveds: Fall/Winter 2025.
Moonlillies, Halfloves, Brutality and Tender Wants. Poetry for the Cold Months.

Abdolmalekian, Bendorf, Carver, Cavanagh, Choi, Cohen, Cummings, Dower, Forché,
Gibson, Glück , Gottlieb, Hershon, Larkin, Limón, Lucas, Millay, Miller, Mueller, Nelson, Nguyen,
Oleanderson, Plath, Sand, Shapero, Shelley, Silvieus, Simpson, Smith, Smith, Updike, Wright, White,
Xu, Zagaiewski,

"Loving you less than life, a little less"

BY EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

Loving you less than life, a little less
Than bitter-sweet upon a broken wall
Or brush-wood smoke in autumn, I confess
I cannot swear I love you not at all.
For there is that about you in this light—
A yellow darkness, sinister of rain—
Which sturdily recalls my stubborn sight
To dwell on you, and dwell on you again.
And I am made aware of many a week
I shall consume, remembering in what way
Your brown hair grows about your brow and
cheek
And what divine absurdities you say:
Till all the world, and I, and surely you,
Will know I love you, whether or not I do.

ABUNDANCE

in memory of Mary Oliver

It's impossible to be lonely
when you're zesting an orange.
Scrape the soft rind once
and the whole room
fills with fruit.
Look around: you have
more than enough.
Always have.
You just didn't notice
until now.

You're

BY SYLVIA PLATH

Clownlike, happiest on your hands,
Feet to the stars, and moon-skulled,
Gilled like a fish. A common-sense
Thumbs-down on the dodo's mode.
Wrapped up in yourself like a spool,
Trawling your dark as owls do.
Mute as a turnip from the Fourth
Of July to All Fools' Day,
O high-riser, my little loaf.

Vague as fog and looked for like mail.
Farther off than Australia.
Bent-backed Atlas, our traveled prawn.
Snug as a bud and at home
Like a sprat in a pickle jug.
A creel of eels, all ripples.
Jumpy as a Mexican bean.
Right, like a well-done sum.
A clean slate, with your own face on.

The Mower

BY PHILIP LARKIN

The mower stalled, twice; kneeling, I found
A hedgehog jammed up against the blades,
Killed. It had been in the long grass.

I had seen it before, and even fed it, once.
Now I had mauled its unobtrusive world
Unmendably. Burial was no help:

Next morning I got up and it did not.
The first day after a death, the new absence
Is always the same; we should be careful

Of each other, we should be kind
While there is still time.

Want

BY JOAN LARKIN

She wants a house full of cups and the ghosts
of last century's lesbians; I want a spotless
apartment, a fast computer. She wants a woodstove,
three cords of ash, an axe; I want
a clean gas flame. She wants a row of jars:
oats, coriander, thick green oil;
I want nothing to store. She wants pomanders,
linens, baby quilts, scrapbooks. She wants Wellesley
reunions. I want gleaming floorboards, the river's
reflection. She wants shrimp and sweat and salt;
she wants chocolate. I want a raku bowl,
steam rising from rice. She wants goats,
chickens, children. Feeding and weeping. I want
wind from the river freshening cleared rooms.
She wants birthdays, theaters, flags, peonies.
I want words like lasers. She wants a mother's
tenderness. Touch ancient as the river.
I want a woman's wit swift as a fox.
She's in her city, meeting
her deadline; I'm in my mill village out late
with the dog, listening to the pinging wind bells,
    thinking
of the twelve years of wanting, apart and together.
We've kissed all weekend; we want
to drive the hundred miles and try it again.

ADULT GRIEF

—for E.V.

Because you were foolish enough to love one place,
now you are homeless, an orphan
in a succession of shelters.
You did not prepare yourself sufficiently.
Before your eyes, two people were becoming old;
I could have told you two deaths were coming.
There has never been a parent
kept alive by a child's love.

Now, of course, it's too late—
you were trapped in the romance of fidelity.
You kept going back, clinging
to two people you hardly recognized
after what they'd endured.

If once you could have saved yourself,
now that time's past: you were obstinate, pathetically
blind to change. Now you have nothing:
for you, home is a cemetery.
I've seen you press your face against the granite markers—
you are the lichen, trying to grow there.
But you will not grow,
you will not let yourself
obliterate anything.

What the Doctor Said

He said it doesn't look good
he said it looks bad in fact real bad
he said I counted thirty-two of them on one lung before
I quit counting them
I said I'm glad I wouldn't want to know
about any more being there than that
he said are you a religious man do you kneel down
in forest groves and let yourself ask for help
when you come to a waterfall
mist blowing against your face and arms
do you stop and ask for understanding at those moments
I said not yet but I intend to start today
he said I'm real sorry he said
I wish I had some other kind of news to give you
I said Amen and he said something else
I didn't catch and not knowing what else to do
and not wanting him to have to repeat it
and me to have to fully digest it
I just looked at him
for a minute and he looked back it was then
I jumped up and shook hands with this man who'd just given me
something no one else on earth had ever given me
I may have even thanked him habit being so strong

RAYMOND CARVER

Things

BY LISEL MUELLER

What happened is, we grew lonely
living among the things,
so we gave the clock a face,
the chair a back,
the table four stout legs
which will never suffer fatigue.

We fitted our shoes with tongues
as smooth as our own
and hung tongues inside bells
so we could listen
to their emotional language,

and because we loved graceful profiles
the pitcher received a lip,
the bottle a long, slender neck.

Even what was beyond us
was recast in our image;
we gave the country a heart,
the storm an eye,
the cave a mouth
so we could pass into safety.

What an age! Every one is dying, everything is dying, and the earth is dying also, eaten up by the sun and the wind. I don't know where I get the courage to keep on living in the midst of these ruins. Let us love each other to the end.

George Sand
Letter to Gustave Flaubert
27th June 1870

Not Horses

BY NATALIE SHAPERO

What I adore is not horses, with their modern
domestic life span of 25 years. What I adore
is a bug that lives only one day, especially if
it's a terrible day, a day of train derailment or
chemical lake or cop admits to cover-up, a day
when no one thinks of anything else, least of all
that bug. I know how it feels, born as I've been
into these rotting times, as into sin. Everybody's
busy, so distraught they forget to kill me,
and even that won't keep me alive. I share
my home not with horses, but with a little dog
who sees poorly at dusk and menaces stumps,
makes her muscle known to every statue.
I wish she could have a single day of language,
so that I might reassure her *don't be afraid—*
our whole world is dead and so can do you no harm.

Salvage

BY HEDGIE CHOI

I have seen deer split open on the road and
    thought

that's exactly what
those

soft and gentle
fuckers

deserve.

Some things happened to me in my formative
    years that I don't want to tell you about
but some things happened to you too.

Art thou pale for weariness

BY PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY

Art thou pale for weariness
Of climbing heaven and gazing on the earth,
Wandering companionless
Among the stars that have a different birth,
And ever changing, like a joyless eye
That finds no object worth its constancy?

May You Always be the Darling of Fortune

BY JANE MILLER

March 10th and the snow flees like eloping
brides into rain. The imperceptible change
begins
out of an old rage and glistens, chaste, with its
new
craving, spring. May your desire always overcome

your need; your story that you have to tell,
enchanting, mutable, may it fill the world
you believe: a sunny view, flowers lunging
from the sill, the quilt, the chair, all things

fill with you and empty and fill. And hurry,
because
now as I tire of my studied abandon, counting
the days, I'm sad. Yet I trust your absence, in
everything
wholly evident: the rain in the white basin, and I

vigilant.

The Shipfitter's Wife

I loved him most
when he came home from work,
his fingers still curled from fitting pipe,
his denim shirt ringed with sweat
and smelling of salt, the drying weeds
of the ocean. I'd go to where he sat
on the edge of the bed, his forehead
anointed with grease, his cracked hands
jammed between his thighs, and unlace
the steel-toed boots, stroke his ankles
and calves, the pads and bones of his feet.
Then I'd open his clothes and take
the whole day inside me — the ship's
gray sides, the miles of copper pipe,
the voice of the foreman clanging
off the hull's silver ribs. Spark of lead
kissing metal. The clamp, the winch,
the white fire of the torch, the whistle,
and the long drive home.

Dorianne Laux

Invasive Species

Something terrible happened today, I say
and my husband rushes to me, searching
for signs of harm. I do not want to tell him
the rest: how I found a tree frog in the door well
of our car, gazing up with what I then imagined
was hope, how I coaxed him into a paper sack
that I carried to a tree with plenty of shade
at the lot's far end, nudged the bag gently,
and waited. How when I returned,
he stared up at me, his leg now askew
from where I had broken it in my hurry.
His gaze was still the same, full not
with hope as I had once imagined but
something else. *I was just trying to help,* I say.
I knew that did not matter.

Leah Silvieus, "Invasive Species"

Seeing a Dog in the Rain

It is raining and there is a dog lying
in the gutter and the gutter is filling
with water because the sewer is clogged.

If the dog were alive he would be drowning
but as it is, the water is simply stroking
his fur.

Laura Gilpin

17. Hope Is Not a Bird, Emily, It's a Sewer Rat

Hope is not the thing with feathers
That comes home to roost
When you need it most.

Hope is an ugly thing
With teeth and claws and
Patchy fur that's seen some shit.

It's what thrives in the discards
And survives in the ugliest parts of our world,
Able to find a way to go on
When nothing else can even find a way in.

It's the gritty, nasty little carrier of such
diseases as
Optimism, persistence,
Perseverance and joy,
Transmissible as it drags its tail across your
path
and
Bites you in the ass.

Hope is not some delicate, beautiful bird,
Emily.
It's a lowly little sewer rat
That snorts pesticides like they were
Lines of coke and still
Shows up on time to work the next day
Looking no worse for wear.

American Poetry

BY LOUIS SIMPSON

Whatever it is, it must have
A stomach that can digest
Rubber, coal, uranium, moons, poems.

Like the shark it contains a shoe.
It must swim for miles through the desert
Uttering cries that are almost human.

Love Poem for An Apocalypse

By Dave Lucas

I wish I'd met you after everything had burned,
after the markets crash and global sea levels rise.
The forests scorched. The grasslands trespassed.
My love, it is a whole life's work to disappear—
ask the god with his head in the wolf's mouth or
the serpent intent on swallowing all the earth.
Ask the senate subcommittee for market solutions
for late capitalism and early-onset dementia.
You and a bird flu could make me believe in fate.
I think we might be happy in the end, in the dark
of a hollow tree, a seed bank or blast-proof bunker,
if only you would sing the song I love, you know
the one about our precious eschatology, the one
I always ask to hear to lull me back to sleep.

I DREAMED I FORGOT

I dreamed I forgot you
but to dream you was remembering.
I have words for you
only, a linguistic fidelity.
Cherish and *anguish* and *fool.*
I look for you, I am finding
out if I am brave. Last
I saw you, it was the same disruptive
season: robins trilling in the young
flush, trees shivering
pink all down the street.
I thought the ache
would ruin me, and maybe it did.
Here I am in the beatific after
still calling back to you.

Leila Chatti

JOHN UPDIKE

SAYING GOODBYE TO VERY YOUNG CHILDREN

They will not be the same next time. The sayings
so cute, just slightly off, will be corrected.
Their eyes will be more skeptical, plugged in
the more securely to the worldly buzz
of television, alphabet, and street talk,
culture polluting their gazes' pure blue.
It makes you see at last the value of
those boring aunts and neighbors (their smells
of summer sweat and cigarettes, their faces
like shapes of sky between shade-giving leaves)
who knew you from the start, when you were zero,
cooing their nothings before you could be bored
or knew a name, not even your own, or how
this world brave with hellos turns all goodbye.

SAINT JUDAS

When I went out to kill myself, I caught
A pack of hoodlums beating up a man.
Running to spare his suffering, I forgot
My name, my number, how my day began,
How soldiers milled around the garden stone
And sang amusing songs; how all that day
Their javelins measured crowds; how I alone
Bargained the proper coins, and slipped away.

Banished from heaven, I found this victim beaten,
Stripped, kneed, and left to cry. Dropping my rope
Aside, I ran, ignored the uniforms:
Then I remembered bread my flesh had eaten,
The kiss that ate my flesh. Flayed without hope,
I held the man for nothing in my arms.

—James Wright

When people say, "we have made it through worse before"

— Clint Smith

all I hear is the wind slapping against the gravestones
of those who did not make it, those who did not
survive to see the confetti fall from the sky, those who

did not live to watch the parade roll down the street.
I have grown accustomed to a lifetime of aphorisms
meant to assuage my fears, pithy sayings meant to

convey that everything ends up fine in the end. There is no
solace in rearranging language to make a different word
tell the same lie. Sometimes the moral arc of the universe

does not bend in a direction that will comfort us.
Sometimes it bends in ways we don't expect & there are
people who fall off in the process. Please, dear reader,

do not say I am hopeless, I believe there is a better future
to fight for, I simply accept the possibility that I may not
live to see it. I have grown weary of telling myself lies

that I might one day begin to believe. We are not all left
standing after the war has ended. Some of us have
become ghosts by the time the dust has settled.

Try to Praise the Mutilated World

BY ADAM ZAGAJEWSKI
TRANSLATED BY CLARE CAVANAGH

Try to praise the mutilated world.
Remember June's long days,
and wild strawberries, drops of rosé wine.
The nettles that methodically overgrow
the abandoned homesteads of exiles.
You must praise the mutilated world.
You watched the stylish yachts and ships;
one of them had a long trip ahead of it,
while salty oblivion awaited others.
You've seen the refugees going nowhere,
you've heard the executioners sing joyfully.
You should praise the mutilated world.
Remember the moments when we were together
in a white room and the curtain fluttered.
Return in thought to the concert where music flared.
You gathered acorns in the park in autumn
and leaves eddied over the earth's scars.
Praise the mutilated world
and the gray feather a thrush lost,
and the gentle light that strays and vanishes
and returns.

STATE BIRD

By Ada Limón May 26, 2014

Confession: I did not want to live here,
not among the goldenrod, wild onions,
or the dropseed, not waist high in the barrel-
aged brown corn water, not with the million-
dollar racehorses, or the tightly wound
round hay bales. Not even in the old tobacco
weigh station we live in, with its heavy metal
safe doors that frame our bricked bedroom
like the mouth of a strange beast yawning
to suck us in, each night, like air. I denied it,
this new land. But, love, I'll concede this:
whatever state you are, I'll be that state's bird,
the loud, obvious blur of song people point to
when they wonder where it is you've gone.

I Have Always Confused Desire With Apocalypse

Daphne Gottlieb

**We met over a small
earthquake. Now, my knees**

**shake whenever
you come around**

**and I've noticed your hand
has a slight tremor**

Moonlily

Marilyn Nelson, 1946

(Mather AFB, California, 1956)

When we play horses at recess, my name
is Moonlily and I'm a yearling mare.
We gallop circles around the playground,
whinnying, neighing, and shaking our manes.
We scrape the ground with scuffiedsaddle oxfords,
thunder around the little kids on swings
and seesaws, and around the boys' ball games.
We're sorrel, chestnut, buckskin, pinto, gray,
a herd in pastel dresses and white socks.
We're self-named, untamed, untouched, unridden.
Our plains know no fences. We can smell spring.
The bell produces metamorphosis.
Still hot and flushed, we file back to our desks,
one bay in a room of palominos.

Instead of Depression

Andrea Gibson 1975 –

try calling it hibernation.
Imagine the darkness is a cave
in which you will be nurtured
by doing absolutely nothing.
Hibernating animals don't even dream.
It's okay if you can't imagine
Spring. Sleep through the alarm
of the world. Name your hopelessness
a quiet hollow, a place you go
to heal, a den you dug,
Sweetheart, instead
of a grave.

I Will Wade Out

by E. E. Cummings

i will wade out
till my thighs are steeped in burning flowers
I will take the sun in my mouth
and leap into the ripe air
Alive
with closed eyes
to dash against darkness
in the sleeping curves of my body
Shall enter fingers of smooth mastery
with chasteness of sea-girls
Will i complete the mystery
of my flesh
I will rise
After a thousand years
lipping
flowers
And set my teeth in the silver of the moon

little prayer

Danez Smith

let ruin end here

let him find honey
where there was once a slaughter

let him enter the lion's cage
& find a field of lilacs

let this be the healing
& if not let it be

PORNOGRAPHY

They shot him by the side of the road. The sun was tangled in his hair as he leaned against the car. He fingered his chest, just over his heart, as if touching it directly. *–My car broke down. –You need oil and a belt. Take off your shirt.* You could consider him compromised. There is no universe where he is not a hitchhiker asking a rancher for help, where he is not plugged in like a lamp. The doctor has to crack the ribs to get to the lungs. The plumber has to pull out the sink to get to the pipes in the walls. The pornographer has to adjust the bodies to catch the slant of the light. He moves them like furniture. In the barn, the rancher spreads a blanket and their clothes fall off considerably. They are technicians. It is a compliment. They clock and clam like eels and the night goes mink. I want to be them. I want to be like them. I want to fuck everything but I don't want to be touched. It's awful, my watching: the refusal to participate, the ogling and smug superiority, the approximation of a true desire. It's fake, but it isn't. It's art, but it isn't. They're pretending but it doesn't matter because they're actually doing it, exhausting themselves as the acting evaporates, peak beauty, that moment—the swan dive, the little death, a bird flying into a kitchen window, open or shut, this or nothing, it strips the bolts. The cameraman is standing very quietly. It looks like he is weeping.

We Have Enough Dead Friends

BY LENA OLEANDERSON

Come over. The doors are open,
my flat's a mess and
so is my heart
but the doors are always open.
Come over. I will make soup,
probably from frozen but
the important thing is
we will both eat.

You don't have to be dying,
but if you are,
or you feel like you are,
or if living's been hard,
call me, and I will show up.
It doesn't have to be that bad,
it doesn't have to be bad at all,
but if it is, please call.

Do you want me to do the groceries?
Do you want me to mop the floors?
Do you need to be held;
you don't have to be dying to be held.
If you want me to be there, I want to.

I'm on the bathroom floor again,
and breathing is hard,
and eating's been hard, and sleeping,
the world is a laden thing
rolling around on my chest lately.
Just being alive is heavy tonight,
but we have enough dead friends.
Come over.

Taking Off My Clothes

BY CAROLYN FORCHÉ

I take off my shirt, I show you.
I shaved the hair out under my arms.
I roll up my pants, I scraped off the hair
on my legs with a knife, getting white.

My hair is the color of chopped maples.
My eyes dark as beans cooked in the south.
(Coal fields in the moon on torn-up hills)

Skin polished as a Ming bowl
showing its blood cracks, its age, I have hundreds
of names for the snow, for this, all of them quiet.

In the night I come to you and it seems a shame
to waste my deepest shudders on a wall of a man.

You recognize strangers,
think you lived through destruction.
You can't explain this night, my face, your memory.

You want to know what I know?
Your own hands are lying.

YOU ARE A DEER MAYBE I AM TOO

after Alexander McQueen

you are a deer
maybe I am too maybe we are both
beautiful deers maybe we are both ugly deers

though
no deer can be ugly
such is a fact of
science & beauty

ugliness isn't a real word or a
real world
our antlers touch
they touch the world

the beautiful real world & they touch
each other which is the only world
it is the only real world there is

& I think we are made of lace
which is almost like knowing

Brutal

BY ANDREA COHEN

Brutal to give
the prisoner a window—
a blue sky glimpse—

as if an afterlife
existed. Brutal
for you to parade

in a body
in the same
room where I dream you.

He said I wrote about death,

Kim Dower

and I didn't mean to, this was not
my intent. I meant to say how I loved
the birds, how watching them lift off
the branches, hearing their song
helps me get through the gray morning.
When I wrote about how they crash
into the small dark places that only birds
can fit through, layers of night sky, pipes
through drains, how I've seen them splayed
across gutters, piles of feathers stuck
together by dried blood, how once my car
ran over a sparrow, though I swerved,
the road was narrow, the bird not quick
enough, dragged it under my tire as I drove
to forget, bird disappearing part by part,
beak, slender feet, fretful, hot,
I did not mean to write about death,
but rather how when something dies
we remember who we love, and we
die a little too, we who are still breathing,
we who still have the energy to survive.

Litany for the Animals Who Run from Me

BY HIEU MINH NGUYEN

Anything can be a bird if you're not careful.
I should say something nice about the weather.
I should be in awe of the living, but the world dulls
when I step into it. The squirrels scatter, the
    branches
lift. Sure, I've hurt the ones I've loved
by not paying attention. *Not alone — never alone*
is a lesson I need to understand. It was you who said
    that.
It's you still. You who says, *Look!* You who points
to the sky. You who tilts my chin toward the heron,
who cups the minnow in your hands,
who spots the deer miles ahead, who dulls
the world with your absence. You who says, *Look!*
& when I look, you are gone, replaced
by the whitetail's hind legs, fading into the bush.

And Then It Was Less Bleak Because We Said So

BY WENDY XU

Today there has been so much talk of things exploding
into other things, so much that we all become curious, that we
all run outside into the hot streets
and hug. Romance is a grotto of eager stones
anticipating light, or a girl whose teeth
you can always see. With more sparkle and pop
is the only way to live. Your confetti tongue explodes
into acid jazz. Small typewriters
that other people keep in their eyes
click away at all our farewell parties. It is hard
to pack for the rest of your life. Someone is always
eating cold cucumber noodles. Someone will drop by later
to help dismantle some furniture. A lot can go wrong
if you sleep or think, but the trees go on waving
their broken little hands.

Elms

BY LOUISE GLÜCK

All day I tried to distinguish
need from desire. Now, in the dark,
I feel only bitter sadness for us,
the builders, the planers of wood,
because I have been looking
steadily at these elms
and seen the process that creates
the writhing, stationary tree
is torment, and have understood
it will make no forms but twisted forms.

LONG EXPOSURE

Garous Abdolmalekian (tr. I. Novey & A. Nadalizadeh)

Even after letting go
of the last bird
I hesitate

There is something
in this empty cage
that never gets released